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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE SITUATION WITH REGARD TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES

VERBATIM RECORD OF THE ONE THOUSAND FOUR HUNDREDTH MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 17 March 1992, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. LOHIA (Papua New Guinea)

- Organization of work
- Cooperation with United Nations bodies

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The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

The CHAIRMAN: The item before the Committee this morning is, of course, related to the organization of our work for this year. As members will recall, on 4 and 6 March, I transmitted to members the draft of the proposed terms of reference for the open-ended Working Group, which had been the subject of consultations among Bureau members and which the Bureau subsequently decided to recommend for approval by the Committee.

I wish to inform members that I have received a number of replies which were circulated before today's meeting to members in an addendum to aide-mémoire 2/92. As can be seen from the replies, the delegations of China, Czechoslovakia and Tunisia had neither comments nor objections, but this should not stop them from making further proposals if they so see fit. The delegation of Trinidad and Tobago made some specific suggestions. I should like at this stage to request the representative of Trinidad and Tobago to present her proposal or proposals in relation to the aide-mémoire.

Mrs. KING-ROUSSEAU (Trinidad and Tobago): At the very outset, let me take this opportunity, Mr. Chairman, to congratulate you warmly on your election to the chairmanship of this Committee. I am sure that there is little need for me to express how appreciative my delegation is that you have agreed to accept this post. Coming as you do from the Pacific, where many of the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories are located, it is most appropriate that at this time the chairmanship has gone to someone from your delegation and to someone of your great skills and fairness. I also take this opportunity to congratulate sincerely the other members of the Bureau.

(Mrs. King-Rousseau,
Trinidad and Tobago)

Actually, I was not prepared to discuss this issue at this time. I did not know that I was to be put on the spot. But I think that the proposals are quite straightforward.

Last year, this Committee discussed at great length the issue of apartheid and its relevance to the work of this Committee. The deliberations were not only lengthy, but also at times most unnerving, actually. Bearing in mind developments in South Africa, my delegation does not feel that those developments warrant any change in the position that we agreed to last year.

The Working Group met, deliberated at length and, as stated in the letter that was sent to the Secretariat:

"agreed that the question of apartheid should be discussed under the relevant resolutions of the Committee, the language of which should be dictated by prevailing circumstances".

Now, as my delegation stated repeatedly last year, we are always flexible in terms of the language of the resolutions and would have no problem in reviewing the language that we adopted at the last session. But, bearing in mind the points just raised, we do not believe that it is necessary, or an appropriate use of our resources, to delve into this issue afresh.

(Mrs. King-Rousseau, Trinidad and Tobago)

Having said that, let me also state that, coming from the Caribbean, where many of the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories are also located, we are of course mindful of the need to emphasise the situation in the remaining small Territories. Be that as it may, it does not mean that continued discussion of the question of apartheid would necessarily detract from the appropriate consideration of developments in the remaining small Territories in the Caribbean and the Pacific.

With respect to the second proposal, where my delegation had requested the deletion of the phrase appearing in subparagraph (f) "in connection with the ongoing reform of the United Nations", the list of Territories that we consider is determined by decisions both of the General Assembly and of the Special Committee. Over the years, some of these decisions - of long standing - in which the General Assembly has pronounced that certain Territories are on the list have caused us to discuss the situation in those Territories; with regard to the one Territory not on the list that we do discuss, we do so as a result of a decision taken each year by the Special Committee, a decision, of course, upon which we take a vote. If we deem it necessary not to discuss that Territory, we can take a decision, as a Committee, as we have done every year, but a decision not to discuss it. The point I am making here is that - specifically with respect to the question of the list of Territories - the issue has no bearing on the ongoing reform in the United Nations. If the General Assembly wishes to delete some Territories from the list, then the General Assembly will take such a decision, but there is, in fact, no connection between the list and ongoing reform.

(Mrs. King-Rousseau, Trinidad and Tobago)

Of course, having said all that, I should like to add that my delegation feels that there is no need to fear discussion of any issue - and we do not fear discussion of any issue. We are prepared for discussion, but, if we are to proceed efficiently and appropriately and to give due cognizance to decisions agreed upon, my delegation feels that the proposals that we have made should be seriously considered.

The CHAIRMAN: I thank the representative of Trinidad and Tobago for her kind words to me and the other members of the Bureau, and also for the submission that she has made to the Committee in relation to the matter under discussion.

Mr. MORENO FERNANDEZ (Cuba) (interpretation from Spanish): Allow me, firstly, to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for having made the necessary arrangements for the terms of reference proposed for the open-ended Working Group to be circulated to delegations, in accordance with the decision we took at our last meeting. Let me give special thanks to the representative of Trinidad and Tobago for putting forward some proposals that we think are very appropriate, and which my delegation completely endorses.

We believe that subparagraph (f) indeed has no reason for being in the text, for the reasons expressed by Trinidad and Tobago, and thus, it is also our view that consideration of the working methods of our Committee, its agenda and the list of Territories for consideration is not directly related

(Mr. Moreno Fernandez, Cuba)

to the process of reform taking place in our Organization. Consequently, my delegation fully supports and endorses the proposals of Trinidad and Tobago for this text.

We think that there are some improvements that can be made. As you will recall, Mr. Chairman, the prevailing view in the Bureau of the Committee of 24 when we examined this matter was directed at the need for the mandate of the open-ended Working Group to be sufficiently broad and general for the Working Group to be able actually to carry out the functions for which it was set up.

Following that line of thinking, it seems to us that we should merge points (b), (c) and (d) into a single point. Point (b) now reads:

(spoke in English)

"Streamling and consolidating of resolutions as well as other documents issued by the Special Committee;".

(spoke in Spanish)

I would not take a great deal of work to add, after the words "Special Committee", a comma and a phrase saying

(spoke in English)

"as well as their language".

(spoke in Spanish)

With this, we would already be covering, in five words, subparagraphs (c) and (d), which in fact refer to the following and nothing else: the language used in the resolutions and in the documents. We would thus be using five words to replace two subparagraphs. They taught me in school that brevity was a good thing, that the fewer words, the better.

(Mr. Moreno Fernandez, Cuba)

In summary then, firstly, we support the proposals put forward by the representative of Trinidad and Tobago and, secondly, we are putting forward a fresh proposal, which consists in merging subparagraphs (b), (c) and (d) by adding, at the end of subparagraph (b), the words

(spoke in English)

"as well as their language".

The CHAIRMAN: I thank the representative of Cuba very much for those very useful suggestions. When you say, Sir, that you support the proposals by the representative of Trinidad and Tobago, do you mean that you also support the proposal referring to subparagraph (f)?

Mr. MORENO FERNANDEZ (Cuba): As I clearly said, Mr. Chairman, my delegation supports the proposals made by Trinidad and Tobago in their entirety. That means the deletion of subparagraph (e) and of the last phrase of subparagraph (f).

The CHAIRMAN: Are there any other comments?

Mr. MAINO (Papua New Guinea): First, let me take this opportunity to thank you, Mr. Chairman, the Bureau and the secretariat for producing the document that is before us for discussion. Since its distribution for comment it has drawn some interesting remarks.

My delegation has no difficulty with the proposed terms of reference. While we fully understand and appreciate the explanations given for suggesting the deletion of subparagraph (e), I should like to draw attention to the fact that the proposed terms of reference for the open-ended Working Group are to serve as the basis for discussion as well as guide it in its work. Therefore, my delegation believes that all issues must be put before it for discussion prior to any firm decision being taken.

As regards subparagraph (f) and the phrase "in connection with the ongoing reform of the United Nations", in view of the rapid changes taking place throughout the world, and in particular the ongoing reforms at the United Nations to cope with those changes, we at the United Nations must not overlook the possibility of new groups of Territories that may emerge on the United Nations list of Non-Self-Governing Territories. We may not see the end of colonialism by the year 2000. Therefore, we must leave all options open for those groups or Territories that may emerge, in order to give them the opportunity to determine their own future.

I therefore suggest that the wording that is the subject of the two proposed amendments be retained as it is.

The CHAIRMAN: Are there any other comments?

Mr. DIARRA (Mali) (interpretation from French): I had not intended to speak, because I thought that the item had been sufficiently gone over by delegations speaking at the beginning of the discussion, particularly with regard to subparagraphs (e) and (f) of the proposed terms of reference for the Working Group set up by the Committee. But the last comment by my colleague from Papua New Guinea prompts me to give my delegation's views, particularly on subparagraph (e).

If a matter is to be discussed in the Working Group it is presumably a disputed issue. This question was discussed at great length last year by the Working Group, which made certain recommendations that were adopted. I thought that a decision had been taken about apartheid, which was that the item should be kept on the Special Committee's agenda. The Special Committee had undertaken to review the content of apartheid-related resolutions to take account of any possible changes in the situation in South Africa. The decision, though not unanimous, was clear. I fail to see what reasons could prompt us to inscribe that matter on the agenda of the Working Group we set up. Of course, the Working Group's mandate may be broadened and opened to all kinds of issues, but issues already decided should not be raised again the next year, especially when we talk of rationalizing our work to economize in the resources used by the Committee.

As regards the proposal concerning subparagraph (f), which my delegation does not regard as a major point, we feel that the ongoing reform of the Organization is entirely separate from this issue; it has nothing to do with the list of Territories to be considered in the Special Committee. Therefore, the last phrase of subparagraph (f) should be deleted, as Trinidad and Tobago has suggested.

(Mr. Diarra, Mali)

That is all I have to say now, and I very much agree with the views of Trinidad and Tobago.

The CHAIRMAN: I thank the representative of Mali for his contribution to this very important exercise. Are there any further comments?

Mr. SLABY (Czechoslovakia): First, I should like to refer to our message to the secretariat, in which we indicated that we had no comments on the proposed terms of reference and stated that the delegation of Czechoslovakia was of the opinion that they created a very good basis for the Working Group's activities.

As regards the recommendations made by Trinidad and Tobago, my delegation has no problems with the proposal relating to subparagraph (f). On subparagraph (e), concerning the question of apartheid, I do not intend to open a debate on whether circumstances in South Africa have or have not altered sufficiently. But, especially today let me make one small remark: that the date for convening this meeting was not very well chosen from that point of view. I am sure that tomorrow we shall know more.

I should like to remind the other members of the Committee, especially members of the Bureau, and especially some members of the Bureau, that the question of a mandate for the open-ended Working Group was discussed at great length during the meetings of the Bureau, and the whole Bureau accepted the recommendation that the open-ended Working Group's mandate should not be restricted. We are sure that that is the only basis for the creation of the open-ended Working Group on the rationalization of the Committee's work. It is from that point of view that my delegation will consider our participation and our active work in the Working Group.

(Mr. Slaby, Czechoslovakia)

Finally, let me make a parenthetical remark. My delegation is ready not to discuss the question of apartheid, because we are of the opinion that it does not fall within the mandate of the Committee.

Mr. MORENO FERNANDEZ (Cuba) (interpretation from Spanish): I apologize for asking to speak again; I had hoped that as the proposals made by Trinidad and Tobago and by my delegation were not controversial there would be no need to make another statement. But that appears not to be the case.

First of all, we entirely agree with the views on subparagraph (e) expressed by the representative of Mali; we believe that he is quite right. But, in addition to the opinions he expressed, there is a further criterion. We note that subparagraph (f) says

(spoke in English)

"Review of the method of work of the Committee, its agenda ...", and so forth.

(spoke in Spanish)

Until now - until 17 March - the question of apartheid has been on the agenda of the Committee. Therefore, singling it out, as in subparagraph (e), is tantamount to redundancy: on the one hand, we are speaking of the agenda, and, on the other, of a specific item of that agenda. When we turn our attention to the Committee's agenda, we will automatically be considering the question of apartheid and all the other agenda items. If we single out apartheid, we have to single out all the others as well; otherwise, we would be duplicating our efforts to reach agreement on this document.

To repeat, summarizing is desirable, but inserting additional words is not.

Mr. HOSSEIN LOFTI (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, Sir, I congratulate you on your election to the chairmanship of the Special Committee. I am confident that under your chairmanship the Committee will successfully fulfil its responsibilities. My congratulations go also to the other members of the Bureau.

I think the proposals made by the representatives of Trinidad and Tobago and Cuba are logical and reasonable. I therefore wish to support those proposals.

The CHAIRMAN: I suggest that we return to the proposal made by the representative of Cuba with reference to subparagraphs (b), (c) and (d). It is proposed that these be merged: subparagraph (b) would now read

"Streamlining and consolidating of resolutions as well as other documents issued by the Special Committee, as well as their language."

The addition of the phrase "as well as their language" would take care of subparagraphs (c) and (d), which would be deleted.

I call on the representative of New Zealand.

Mr. KEMBER (New Zealand): I would like to begin with a couple of questions. Before addressing the point the Chairman has just raised, I want to return to subparagraph (f). The inference I drew from the draft terms of reference was that the phrase "in connection with the ongoing reform of the United Nations" referred in particular to the method of work of the Committee. It is entirely appropriate that the Committee set its agenda and its list of Territories - and, if I remember rightly from the discussions that took place in the Working Group last year and previously, the list of Territories is something that may indeed merit a subparagraph of its own. I wonder whether what is in fact meant by subparagraph (f) is something along the following lines:

(Mr. Kember, New Zealand)

"Review of the method of work of the Committee in connection with the ongoing reform of the United Nations; as well as its agenda and list of Territories".

In other words the reform clause the drafters of this paper put together referred to the method of work rather than to the agenda and the list of Territories. That is one point of clarification.

The second point raised by the representative of Cuba concerns the possible consolidation of subparagraphs. If I infer correctly from the comments made by him and, earlier, by the representative of Trinidad and Tobago, there is nothing in his suggestion that precludes the assumption that subparagraph (e) would also be subsumed into subparagraph (b) along with subparagraphs (c) and (d), with the five-word addition to subparagraph (b).

It seems to an outside observer of this Committee that the very debate that has taken place this morning suggests that the question of apartheid is still a live issue. Quite clearly, the language of the resolutions in toto as well as any references to apartheid will be a point for discussion during the course of this year, and not only in this Committee.

I throw those two suggestions out for the consideration of the Committee.

The CHAIRMAN: I would like to point out to the members of the Committee that, both in the open-ended Working Group last year, which I chaired, and in the substantive meetings of this Committee, it was clearly stated and noted by members that this exercise - the review of the work of the Committee - is an ongoing matter. Therefore, the open-ended Working Group

(The Chairman)

has an open-ended agenda. However, in order to provide some guidance, it would be useful for the Committee to set out some points regarding the review of its work.

I would also like to add that the point of the exercise by the open-ended Working Group is to facilitate the consideration of substantive matters by the Subcommittee and the Committee's consideration of the items discussed and the recommendations made by the Subcommittee.

(The Chairman)

So it is, in my view, a matter of importance, and if we see it in that light, it might help us. We may decide now to delete some points and to include others. The Committee decided that the membership of the open-ended Working Group is open to the members of the Committee, to States Members of the United Nations not members of the Committee and to the representatives of the Non-Self-Governing Territories. Should any of these delegations come up with a proposal, the open-ended Working Group would be willing to discuss it in order to help the process of review. Moreover, with a view to guiding our work, I believe that the exercise should relate to the overall reform necessary for the United Nations. For example, a proposal has been made to study whether the Fourth Committee should be phased out or merged with the Special Political Committee. That issue is still alive. Indeed, the President of the General Assembly is considering that proposal in conjunction with others. I am making these comments merely to help the members see the direction in which we are moving as regards the terms of reference of the open-ended Working Group.

Having said that, I should now like to return to the proposal by Cuba that, by adding the phrase "as well as their language" at the end of point (b), the matters in points (c) and (d) would be fully taken into account, which means that those points are also open to review. This is my interpretation. The representative of Cuba is nodding in agreement. Unless I hear otherwise, I shall take it that the Committee wishes to adopt the proposal.

It was so decided.

The CHAIRMAN: The Committee will now take up the proposal that the question of apartheid, subparagraph (e), should be deleted from the open-ended Working Group's proposed terms of reference. I take it that the supporters of this proposal are fully aware that matters related to apartheid may be raised during the review process.

May I take it that the Committee agrees to delete subparagraph (e), noting that this is taken into account by the amendments that have been adopted?

It was so decided.

The CHAIRMAN: The Committee will now turn to subparagraph (f), taking note of the useful comments made by the delegation of New Zealand, which is probably the most active administering Power in our work. Are there are any further comments?

Mrs. KING-ROUSSEAU (Trinidad and Tobago): I should like to make a point of clarification. In view of your comment earlier in this meeting, Mr. Chairman, regarding the reform measure to merge the Fourth Committee and the Special Political Committee, which is an issue that may be discussed by the Working Group, I should like to know whether it is the general feeling and understanding that this is one of the issues that we will be discussing. I am raising this question because if that is in fact the case, let us state it head on rather than by implication in some of the proposals. Let us say exactly what we mean. If the Committee does feel that we should discuss this issue, there should be a separate subparagraph on the ongoing reform of the United Nations as it relates to decolonization. If the Committee generally feels that this issue should be discussed, it should say so; if not, it should make that clear as well. We must be clear as to exactly what we are deciding.

Mr. MORENO FERNANDEZ (Cuba) (interpretation from Spanish): In response to the question raised by the representative of Trinidad and Tobago, it is the understanding of my delegation that the matter of the possible merger of the Fourth Committee and the Special Political Committee is not what would be discussed by the open-ended Working Group. Indeed, that question does not fall within the purview of the Committee of 24 and even less so of an open-ended Working Group that would deal with revitalizing the Committee's work. There is other machinery within the United Nations system to address the structure of and the possible ways of reforming the General Assembly.

Therefore, even in the light of the interpretation offered by the representative of New Zealand - who of course is the representative not only of the most active administering Power but also of the most positive one, if I may say so - I continue to have doubts that the reference to the reform process of the United Nations has anything directly to do with this paragraph, including with regard to the Committee's working methods. Members are all aware of the reforms made thus far in the United Nations Secretariat. Reform of the General Assembly and of the economic and social sectors is under consideration. As far as I know, there is no process of reform with regard to the working methods of the subsidiary bodies; there is a process of reform relating to the structures of these bodies and not regarding the working methods. This Committee, like other subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly, must decide on its own working methods on the basis of the mandate given it under General Assembly resolutions.

Consequently, I continue to have major doubts that there is any link between the process of reform of the United Nations and the remaining elements in the current paragraph.

The CHAIRMAN: I should like to return to subparagraph (f) and the proposal that has been made. I am thankful to the representative of Cuba for his remarks because that is also my understanding. I merely point out that any discussion of that type or any discussion in relation to the Fourth Committee will have implications on the work of this Committee. Therefore, I flagged that for our notice only.

Mrs. KING-ROUSSEAU (Trinidad and Tobago): I hope that this will be the last time I take the floor. I apologize for continuing to do so.

May I just say that the phrase "in connection with the ongoing reform of the United Nations" in subparagraph (f) seems to be somewhat in the nature of editorializing. The Working Group last year, in the formulation of its report, did in fact acknowledge the ongoing reforms in the United Nations. So that is not an issue here. We all agree to the report and last year the Special Committee itself adopted and endorsed that report, which, as I said, referred to ongoing reform of the United Nations.

The phrase is appropriate in the general report submitted by the Working Group. But in this text, it really seems to be in the nature of editorializing. In that respect, I think we should be pointed in the terms of reference, and editorializing has no place in anybody's terms of reference. I would suggest therefore that we take it out.

The CHAIRMAN: Once again, I put the proposal to the Committee. May I take it that the proposal of the representative of Trinidad and Tobago is endorsed by the Committee?

It was so decided.

The CHAIRMAN: Let us move on to subparagraph (g). I wish to propose that we take into account the important statement made by the Secretary-General at our opening organizational meeting.

(The Chairman)

In connection with this subparagraph, I should like to propose from the Chair that we include, following the words "administering Powers", the words "bearing in mind the statement of the Secretary-General to the 5 February 1992 organizational meeting of the Committee".

If there are no comments on this proposal from the Chair, I shall take it that the Committee agrees to include those words.

It was so decided.

The CHAIRMAN: If there are no further comments, I shall take it that the Committee agrees to adopt the terms of reference, as amended.

It was so decided.

Mr. ADOUKI (Congo) (interpretation from French): I note with satisfaction that the Committee has just adopted, after a debate rich with edifying lessons, the mandate that, over the months ahead, will guide the work of the Working Group, from which we expect a great deal.

I need not recall here the efforts - which this morning's debate further emphasized - made last year by many delegations - particularly the delegation of the Congo - with the aim of improving our approach and working methods and adapting them to current realities. Under your chairmanship last year, Mr. Chairman, the Committee set up for this purpose a Working Group which has made substantial progress possible. Your very positive contribution to the chairmanship of the Working Group has enabled it to make some very useful recommendations to the Committee.

That is why, for the sake of continuity and in the light of the remarkable results already achieved, I wish to propose to the Committee that you again be entrusted with the chairmanship of the Working Group. If, as I fervently hope, the members of the Committee endorse this proposal, my

(Mr. Adouki, Congo)

delegation would like here and now to assure you that it will do its utmost to help you carry out this delicate task.

The CHAIRMAN: The Permanent Representative of the Congo has proposed that the Chairman of last year's Working Group - namely me - continue in that capacity this year. If there are no comments, may I take it that the Committee is in agreement with the proposal just made by the Permanent Representative of the Congo.

It was so decided.

The CHAIRMAN: In order to make maximum use of the time available to the Committee, I wish to inform members that the first meeting of the open-ended Working Group will, subject to confirmation, be held tomorrow, 18 March, at 3 p.m. in Conference Room 7. Members are kindly requested to consult the Journal.

COOPERATION WITH UNITED NATIONS BODIES

The CHAIRMAN: I am sure members are aware that the visiting mission of the Trusteeship Council to Palau will take place beginning next week and that I am a member of that mission as a representative of Papua New Guinea. I wish to inform members in that respect that I have received an invitation to pay a courtesy call on behalf of the Special Committee on the Governor of Guam, the Honourable Joseph F. Ada. I shall report thereon to the Committee on my return to New York.

I take this opportunity to thank all representatives for giving their time to come to this meeting. I should like to emphasize that the Working Group's work will facilitate the work of the Subcommittee; therefore, members' contributions to or participation in the work of the open-ended Working Group is very important.

The meeting rose at 11.30 a.m.